



# Wanda Jackson

ROCKIN' **IN THE** COUNTRY

1. **LET'S HAVE A PARTY**

(Robinson)  
(Capitol single #4397, 7/60)

2. **HONEY BOP**

(Reeves/Durden/Axton)  
(Capitol single #3941, 4/58)

3. **BABY LOVES HIM**

(Jackson)  
(Capitol single #3637, 2/57)

4. **HOT DOG! THAT MADE HIM MAD**

(Barker/Raye)  
(Capitol single #3575, 12/56)

5. **MEAN MEAN MAN**

(Jackson)  
(Capitol single #4469, 10/60)

6. **COOL LOVE**

(Countryman/Jackson)  
(Capitol single #3764, 8/57)

7. **RIOT IN CELL BLOCK #9**

(Stoller/Leiber)  
(Capitol single #4520, 3/61)

8. **FUJIYAMA MAMA**

(Burrows)  
(Capitol single #3843, 12/57)

9. **SAVIN' MY LOVE**

(Jackson)  
(Capitol single #4142, 2/59)

10. **WHY I'M WALKIN'**

(Jackson/Endsley)  
(From the Capitol LP *Right Or Wrong* #1596, 8/61)

11. **RIGHT OR WRONG**

(Jackson)  
(Capitol single #4553, 5/61)

12. **TEARS WILL BE THE  
CHASER FOR YOUR WINE**

(Davis/Coates)  
(Capitol single #5789, 11/66)

13. **IN THE MIDDLE  
OF A HEARTACHE**

(Franzese/Christianson/Jackson)  
(Capitol single #4635, 9/61)

14. **FANCY SATIN PILLOWS**

(Crutchfield/Moeller)  
(Capitol single #2986, 11/70)

15. **MY BIG IRON SKILLET**

(Creswell/Creswell)  
(Capitol single #2614, 9/69)

16. **THE BOX IT CAME IN**

(McAlpin)  
(Capitol single #5559, 12/65)

17. **A GIRL DON'T HAVE TO  
DRINK TO HAVE FUN**

(Williams/Nixon)  
(Capitol single #2021, 11/67)

18. **MAKING BELIEVE**

(Work)  
(From the Capitol LP *Wanda Jackson* #1041, 9/58)

Tracks 4, 7, 16, and 17 are CD BONUS TRACKS



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**T**ina Turner, Madonna, Janet Jackson, Taylor Dayne, Bonnie Raitt and Paula Abdul all owe a substantial debt to Wanda Lavonne Jackson, the first female rocker. Her driving rockabilly music and strong visual image (raven hair and form-fitting dresses) projected a healthy sexuality that paved the way for everyone who came after. Only one of her explosive late '50s rockabilly recordings became a hit, and a minor one at that. Yet today, all are considered among the genre's greatest recordings. When they didn't sell, she returned to country music and eventually found the stardom that had eluded her.

Born on October 20, 1937 in Maud, Oklahoma, 50 miles southeast of Oklahoma City, Wanda got her first guitar while living in California from 1941 to 1949, after which the Jacksons returned to Oklahoma City, where Tom Jackson sold cars. Wanda won a talent contest and got her own radio show on KLPR, which she hosted while attending high school.

Singer Hank Thompson, having his first hits with Capitol Records, heard her KLPR broadcasts and soon she was singing with his Brazos Valley Boys on

weekends. When he found a song for her to record with the band in 1954, Capitol declined to sign an underage artist. Instead, Decca recorded "You Can't Have My Love," her sassy duet with Brazos Valley Boys bandleader Billy Gray, a #8 country hit that year. After she cut 15 sides for Decca, Capitol opened its doors to her in 1956, when she turned 18, and for most of the next 17 years, Ken Nelson produced her records.

That year, working country package shows in the South, Wanda met Elvis Presley, whose Sun recordings were stirring things up down there. As they became friendly, Elvis suggested she try rockabilly. "Elvis said, 'You should be doin' this kind of music'" Jackson recalls. "I said 'I'm just a country singer.' He said, 'I am too, basically. But you can do this' . . . He took me to his home and we went through his record collection of black blues." She made a tentative attempt to rock with "I Gotta Know," which got to #15 on Billboard's country charts in the fall of 1956. For the next several years, most of her singles paired a rocker on one side with a country tune on the other.

As she gained confidence, she created a dazzling visual image. "I was really a maverick," she says. "I designed my own clothes.

I went into silk fringe and high heels. I tried to put some glamor and sex appeal into country music. It gave me a whole new start." But at the conservative Grand Old Opry, where even Elvis had been viewed suspiciously, that "new start" was quickly stopped.

"I had a brand new dress, and was about to go on and Ernest Tubbs said 'You're not wearing that on stage are you?' I said, 'Yes, sir.' He said, 'You can't show your shoulders'" says Jackson. "(The dress) had little rhinestone spaghetti straps and wasn't low-cut or anything. I said 'What do you mean?' He said 'You can't show your shoulders.' I had to get an old fringed jacket I'd worn and cover my dress. I was so mad I could hardly sing. That's the only time I did the Opry, I said 'Never again!'"

With Elvis dominating the charts through 1956 and 1957, Wanda's own rockabilly hits were minimal. Many of her best sides were recorded during this period. One was "**Honey Bop**," written by the composers of "Heartbreak Hotel." Wanda knew what sound she needed on that number: "It was one of the first times Ken had used echo chambers. I wanted it just like Gene Vincent so he said, 'ok, I know what you mean.'"

During this same time she cut "**Baby Loves Him**" and "**Hot Dog! That Made Him Mad**," which actress Betty Hutton had recorded for Capitol in 1954. Wanda's choice of refreshment hindered her efforts on "Hot Dog": "We took a break and I went to the little Coke area. Ken went there and I was drinkin' milk. And he said, 'Put that milk down! Put it down! Never, never drink milk when you're recording. It fogs your throat something terrible!' So on that record it's not clear and growly like I wanted."

Backup musicians on these sessions included musicians from the popular Town Hall Party TV show. The legendary Joe Maphis, who recorded with The Collins Kids and on Rick Nelson's pre-James Burton Imperial sides, played lead guitar; Buck Owens, then a Capitol studio musician, played rhythm guitar. Capitol vocalist Skeet McDonald played bass, Pee Wee Adams played drums, and on some tracks, Capitol country boogie pianist Merrill Moore sat in. "Honey Bop" features a steel guitarist, possibly Ralph Mooney.

Maphis and Company backed Wanda on the rocker many consider her greatest: her version of R&B singer Annisteen Allen's 1955 Capitol recording of



"**Fujiyama Mama**." Wanda's snarling, razor-sharp vocal had a malevolence few singers of either gender could equal, and she remains proud of it. "I remember hearing it while I was still in school, on a jukebox, and I just flipped over it . . . That and 'Party' were two of my best."

"Party" was "**Let's Have A Party**" from Elvis' 1957 film *Loving You*. Wanda recorded it in 1958. She had a new backup band, Bobby Poe and The Po' Kats, featuring pianist Big Al Downing (Known for the rockabilly "Georgia Slop" and "Down On The Farm"), bassist Rodney Lay and guitarist Vernon Sandusky. On "Party" she says, "Big Al was havin' trouble playin' the way he wanted to. He wasn't happy with the break or kickoff, so we said, 'Al, do it like you do onstage.'

When it came that time he scooted that piano back and pounded it, so he got the sound he wanted."

She also recorded the roaring "**Mean Mean Man**" with this particular group. Of the performance itself, author Nick Tosches has said, "the joys of being slapped around were praised through wet lips." "It's origins," says Wanda, "were much more innocent." Her dad gave her the title and suggested a guitar intro much like Vernon Sandusky played.



"Party" was forgotten until 1960, when, Wanda recalls, "a disc jockey in Des Moines, Iowa started playin' it and began to get swamped with requests. He got in touch with Capitol and said 'you've got a hit record if you'll put it out on a single' and they did." "Party," with "**Cool Love**" (originally released in 1957) as



the B-side, reached #37 on Billboard's pop charts that fall, and Capitol assembled a dozen rockers into the classic *Rockin' With Wanda* LP. Her new band, The Party Timers, formed in 1960, was named for her hit.

"I had two of the finest guitar players: Dave Ronson and Roy Clark" says Wanda. "Ken Nelson saw Roy and was really impressed with him." But rockabilly was waning; from 1957 to 1959 she had no big hits and decided to re-emphasize country songs. "I was dyin' on the vine," she says. "I was still workin' but chartwise I wasn't doing anything."

On one 1961 Nashville session, Nelson augmented Clark and Ronson with guitarist Grady Martin, pianist Pig Robbins, drummer Buddy Harman, bassman Bob Moore and a vocal group. That day Wanda cut **"Right Or Wrong"** and **"In The Middle Of A Heartache."** She also rocked one last time with a burning version of The Clovers' **"Riot In Cell Block #9."** "Right Or Wrong" and "Heartache" reached #9 and #6 on the country charts respectively and crossed over to the pop charts. For the *Right Or Wrong* LP, Wanda included Stonewall Jackson's hit **"Why I'm Walkin'."** "Heartache," she feels, could have done better, and she's candid

about the reason it didn't.

"We killed that song ourselves—rather stupid, but hindsight is better than foresight" she says. "Heartache" was startin' to go and I recorded 'Little Bitty Tear' . . . slated to be next. I was told I had an exclusive by the composer. 'Heartache' was really hot and here comes Burl Ives with 'Little Bitty Tear' . . . an overnight smash. We felt we had a better version and released ours. 'Tear' didn't do anything big for me and 'Heartache' didn't do as well as it



Wanda and Her Party Timers

should have, either."

She averaged about one hit a year, and her next big one came in 1966 with veteran songwriter Vic McAlpin's **"The Box It Came In,"** #18 early in 1966. She did better late that year with **"Tears Will Be The Chaser For Your Wine,"** which rose to #11.

At their later recording ses-



Hank Thompson and Wanda

sions, all done in Nashville, Wanda and Ken Nelson strove for individuality, in a search that may have undermined her. "I tried different steel players, whoever might be hot . . . Lloyd Green . . . we used Weldon Myrick a lot. That's why I've got so many different sounds" Wanda says. "I was always searchin' for 'my' sound, which I never really got. I did too many different styles of songs."

If Wanda's early music seemed rebellious, her later records were far more conservative. This was best exemplified by her hit, **"A Girl Don't Have To Drink To Have Fun,"** a #22 in 1967, written by a couple who were friends of Wanda and her husband, Wendell Goodman, whom she'd married in 1961.

Ken Nelson was still producing, but Wanda began to be assigned different Capitol staff



producers. Nashville guitarist-turned producer Kelso Herston produced **"My Big Iron Skillet."** "Everybody produced me that was ever with Capitol in those days," Jackson says. "That's when I really got disgusted because I wanted Ken." Her final Top 20 hit, 1970's **"Fancy Satin Pillows,"** was produced by Larry Butler, whom she found more satisfactory. "Larry was one of my favorite producers, next to Ken," she says.

In 1972, after 16 years, Wanda finally left Capitol. The year before, she and Wendell had become Christians, and she'd recorded one gospel LP for Capitol. She wanted to do another, but Ken Nelson declined. "Ken said, 'We just can't. We're not a gospel label'" says Wanda. "I was unhappy. And he said, 'Why don't I see if I can get you a release from your contract, if that's what you really want, and you pursue a company that does this exclusively?'"

She joined Myrrh Records, which promised to market her in both gospel and country markets. But when the company was sold, Wanda found herself locked into

gospel, creating a misconception about her career. "Everybody thought I left country music to go with gospel. I didn't. It was forced on me. I was signed for five years and I couldn't get out of it."

European rock fans, however, hadn't forgotten "Party," "Fujiyama Mama" and the rest. In the U.S., Wanda's husband booked her for country shows, and she was performing extensively in churches. "Europe totally revived my secular career," she explains. Overseas they wanted her country and rockabilly hits, particularly in Scandinavia and England. She accommodated them, throwing in a bit of gospel.

She had no trouble reconciling her religion and her secular music. "All the early country things stemmed from Gospel" Wanda says. "Most everyone was brought up on that music and it just kind of filtered into our secular music. A lot of people are shocked. They say how can you do religious songs in America and then do rock overseas? They think maybe my convictions aren't firm, but they are. My lifestyle is a Christian lifestyle, but I

have no problems doin' those early rock things. In those days everybody was bouncin' from one thing to another. It wasn't unusual."

Today, Wanda has found satisfaction and the best of all worlds. She records for Sweden's Tab Records, with the freedom to sing the music she loves: the rockers she pioneered, the country that made her a star and the gospel music she deeply believes in. Her work in churches and on the stages of Europe keeps her busy.

"It's the most satisfying thing in my whole career," she says. Amen.

-Rich Kienzle

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It was exciting news for me the day Rhino Records called saying they wanted to re-release many of the hit songs from my early Country and Rockabilly recordings. A lot of the younger generation of fans around the world want to purchase these songs, but find they have been deleted for many years; this collection will make them very happy!

I feel honored that after 36 years of recording and doing concerts, people still enjoy my singing. What more could I ask?

These songs bring back many happy memories for me. Some are from my first album; others I sang on shows with Elvis himself. One was a smash hit in Japan and is still popular there. Several of them are songs I wrote myself and have special meaning to me. My hope is that, as you listen to them, they will make or bring back special memories for you.

Enjoy!

*Wanda Jackson*

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